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ABSTRACT

This speech by the U.S. Commissioner of Education Discusses federally funded programs in career education; their scope, finances, and objectives. It also touches upon the need for vocational education programs, and the 1976 amendments to the Higher Education Act. (MML)

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CAREER EDUCATION ON THE MARCH *

Edward Aguirre
U.S. Commissioner of Education

Ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a pleasure to be here taking part with you in the Commissioner's National Conference on Career Education.

A look at your schedule, as well as conversations with some of you, tells me that you have been remarkably busy since you convened three days ago. There must be little about career education and its implications for all of society that you have not examined. Many of you have been explaining, demonstrating, and exhibiting the career education work you are involved in, and I think it's fairly safe to assume that the rest of you have been listening intently because of an already established interest in the career education concept.

Yesterday you heard from Peter Bommarito and Richard Terrel regarding the goals of career education. Though the former is from labor and the latter from industry, one thing that came through clearly is that they both agree that career education should not be a device to categorize people -- to limit their level of aspiration. Career Education is not vocational education or College Preparatory. It is not for only one segment of society, but for all segments -- doctors, lawyers, and teachers, as well as skilled workers. As Bommarito said yesterday, "We do not view career education as a panacea, but rather as an enrichment of a system designed to ever widen the horizons of all Americans." I could not have said it better.

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So, I certainly share the commitment to career education and have for a long time. We are all here for the same reason -- to learn from each other, to share ideas, plans, methods, and hunches that will bring more meaning to education and work and, ultimately, more happiness throughout life for every individual. A conference of this size and depth, which brings together persons from every level of education, every sector of society, every part of the country, and every sort of background is the best testimony we have that career education's potential can become a reality.

We've come a long way in the five years since Commissioner Sid Marland first pushed the concept of career education on a national level. Hats off to all of you who have taken the philosophy of career education and put it into practice at the local level.

At the federal level, with passage of the Education Amendments of 1974 career education became more than an OE initiative supported within other programs. The law set up an Office of Career Education, which has been under the able direction of Dr. Ken Hoyt.

During its first year of operation, fiscal 1975, the Federal program had $10 million to spend. It funded 81 projects across the country which focused on developing career education models of five general kinds:

- # Those within regular kindergarten through high school curriculums.
- # Those that zero in on such settings as a community agency or a community college.
- # Those that target special populations like the handicapped or minority group members.

Training and retraining activities for persons conducting career education programs, and . . .

Projects communicating to the public the methods and activities of career education.

Some of the projects we funded may have been presented in some of the topic sessions, but I'll mention a few briefly to point out the diversity and scope of our awards.

A project at the University of Alabama developed a mobile "career wagon" loaded with printed and audiovisual career information. Over the course of the year, it was dispatched for a time to every academic department of the university. Project staff members were on hand to help professors use the materials and infuse career education into their courses.

In rural Castleton-on-Hudson, New York, schools, parents, and the community participated in a project involving more than 250 educable mentally retarded children. Teachers and parents worked out a few daily tasks a child could perform at home and at school. These tasks helped boost the child's self-esteem and helped him or her to form good work habits early. Community leaders were invited into the classroom to observe that handicapped students are, in fact, quite able to perform many structured tasks well.

In another project, Northern Virginia Community College, in Annandale, developed self-instruction skills packages which provided off-campus career education for adults. Each package contained a series of activities in the areas of decision-making, self-appraisal, transitional skills, and training.

In its second year, the Career Education Program again had a little more than $10 million to fund projects for fiscal 1977. Seventy-one projects were funded in the same five categories as the previous year, but 47 grants were awarded also to State-level education agencies to develop plans for implementing career education in all local school districts. I'd say that figure of 47 speaks quite well for the interest career education has generated in 44 States, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

This year's career education activities by the Office of Career Education remain pretty much the same. However, the Education Amendments of 1976 contain a provision, to take effect in 1978, authorizing $10 million to provide Federal assistance to States for the planning of career education programs. Although this provision is limited to planning, Congress, in its next session, is expected to consider a major bill implementing career education.

Also holding great promise for career education are the new vocational education amendments. At one time, the mention of vocational education and career education in the same sentence was considered too risky to chance. I think by now almost everyone realizes that vocational education is only one part, although an essential part, of career education. The latest amendments reinforce the trend among vocational educators to emphasize broad-based skills and work habits that can be applied to a variety of jobs during a career -- those adaptability skills that are such a key element of career education.

Now that I've touched on some of the current Federal initiatives in career education, I'd like to talk about the reason all of you are here today. The various sectors of society which you represent are exploring career education together for a very good reason -- career education needs that partnership to succeed.

At this point I should note that a number of States and local school systems are considering or already are requiring students to pass a proficiency examination in the "three Rs" before they can receive a high school diploma. The Adult Performance Level study released by the Office of Education a year ago showed that 16 percent of presumably "educated" adult Americans, some 18.9 million individuals, are unable to cope successfully with such things as consumer education and matters relating to government and law for lack of a real grasp on the fundamentals of reading, writing, and computation.

It has become increasingly clear too that young people are not adequately learning the social skills of decision-making, self-reliance, goal-orientation, and the ability to change with change.

I know you've all heard about lack of coping and social skills. You've heard about high school and college graduates with high levels of job dissatisfaction or unprepared to face the changing economy and the scarcity of jobs that goes along with it. These realities helped bring about the career education concept which has brought you all here. What do they have to do with forming a partnership among all segments of society? Let me explain.

In several recent reports, most people were quoted as saying that most of what they know they learned at home. This was followed by what they had learned on the job.

Learning is not and never has been restricted to the school setting. Outside learning is as essential to adequate preparation for life as the school is. This leads us to the unremarkable conclusion that, if education transcends the schools, so does the responsibility for providing it. And it seems to make a good deal of sense to work together -- through a partnership -- to provide the best possible learning environments. I see career education as a vehicle through which this can be done.

With the help of schools, parents, working people, and community organizations, career education can find new ways to motivate young people to learn both through work and through school. It can find new ways to open the doors of learning to people of all ages and to make learning so exciting that the learner will not stop in his or her self-development when the immediate demands of a job are met.

Walter Davis, director of education for the AFL-CIO, recently estimated that by 1985 more than half of the American work force will be engaged in skills and jobs which have not yet been invented or developed. In that sense, the immediate demands of any job are never met for long.

Along the same lines, the U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that the average American today will change occupations up to seven times in his or her life. I'm sure Congress had this estimate in mind when it passed legislation calling for lifelong learning in the 1976 amendments to the

Higher Education Act. The new legislation authorizes funds for three years for the planning and development of activities necessary to fulfilling the purpose of lifelong learning. I'd like to share with you a few of Congress' findings which led to passage of the bill. Quoting from the House-Senate conference report:

- # The American people need lifelong learning to enable them to adjust to social, technological, political, and economic changes.

- # Lifelong learning has a role in developing the potential of all persons, including improvement of their personal well-being, upgrading their workplace skills, and preparing them to participate in the civic, cultural, and political life of the Nation.

- # Learning takes place through formal and informal instruction, through educational programs conducted by public and private educational and other institutions and organizations--through independent study, and through the efforts of business, industry, and labor.

- # Planning is necessary at the national, State, and local levels to assure effective use of existing resources in the light of changing characteristics and learning needs of the population . . .

These are not new findings, of course, but once again they enunciate the fact that learning takes place in many different settings. It is encouraging that practically all the education legislation coming out of Congress lately has included a commitment to some aspect of career education. Certainly adaptability skills must also be considered a vital ingredient of lifelong learning.

A few things won't change. Our society will always need doctors, lawyers, teachers, plumbers, and a vast array of other workers. A good many jobs will continue to require four or more years of college. A good many will not, but with adequate career education, beginning in the early years, each individual will hold the decision-making skills necessary to determine what form of educational training he or she needs after high school.

Although every young person should be encouraged to go as far as his or her interests and abilities will allow, without the financial means to pursue a career goal, all the awareness in the world won't help. We must make postsecondary education accessible to all who want it, not just to the wealthy who can afford it.

But freedom of choice in determining a career means more than money. It also means eliminating the forces of racism and sexism that have channelled our young people into stereotyped occupations. Career education has a great deal to offer toward this end. It begins exposing children to a wide range of career possibilities when they are young and impressionable.

This year the Office of Career Education funded a few projects with the specific purpose of reducing sex-role stereotyping in career choice. More important, the Office's project officers consider this a chief concern as they monitor and provide technical assistance to all 118 of our career education projects.

One of the most beneficial side-effects of career education is the presentation of other role models. It gives young people a chance to have contact with more than half of society -- the adult and employed half. With the near demise of the extended family and the emphasis on peer activities during the teen-age years, there is little opportunity for youths to come together with adults other than their parents and teachers -- both authority figures. The transition to responsible adulthood is never easy, but it can certainly be helped along if young people are exposed to adult life in a variety of settings throughout their growing-up years.

As I conclude my remarks, so too the Commissioner's National Conference on Career Education concludes.

The question remaining is: "Where do we go from here?" I'm sure the intense examination of career education during this conference has given all of us some fresh ideas and insights. But the true success of this conference will be determined by what we do when we return to our jobs.

The wide differences from community to community in learner needs, resources, and mores make it impossible to define career education as anything but a concept to be acted upon individually by each community. It behooves all of us, then, to take a long, hard look at the needs of whatever segment of society we represent as we formulate policies and action plans for the future.

The local, grassroots level is where the action counts, but I hope that the national associations and organizations represented at this conference formulate firm policy positions on career education that include specific roles and functions for their members to consider at the local level.

The partnership so vital to career education will succeed only if the various sectors of society link together to form a career education chain. I am confident that, with the resolve to do it, it can be done. I thank all of you for making this conference a landmark in American education.

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